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ABSTRACT

This report presents the findings of a telephone survey of 1,181 adults and 390 librarians which was conducted in 1991 to elicit information on their opinions of services libraries ought to provide; the kinds of materials that should be available to certain people; who should be responsible for libraries; groups who might be involved in controversies about the kinds of materials libraries should have; and alternative solutions to a library's need for additional funds to continue operations. The general public was also asked how often they had used public libraries within the previous year and the services they had used; whether they were comfortable using public libraries; whether they feel that most people who use public libraries have similar backgrounds and values; if they had not used a public library, why they had not; whether they have a personal computer at home; and background questions on their political orientation, the size of their community, the type of community (rural, urban, or suburban), the highest grade in school completed, whether there are any children between the ages of 5 and 18 in the household, their year of birth, ethnic origin, and total household income before taxes. The interviewer was also instructed to record the sex of the respondent without asking. Analyses of the data for individual questions are first reported by percentages of respondents who selected each of four suggested responses and then by the respondent's income (under or over $25,000), age (under or over 40), and race. A copy of the questionnaire is included. (BBM)

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National Opinion Poll on Library Issues

Fall 1991

Library Research Center

1961-1991

30 Years of Supporting Libraries Through Research

The Graduate School of Library and Information Science

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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National Opinion Poll on Library Issues
Fall 1991
Library Research Center
Graduate School of Library and Information Science
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

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The following questions were asked by telephone of 1181 adults. The margin of error for the responses is +/- 3%. Questions preceded by an asterisk (*) are analyzed in more detail in Appendix A. The "Don't know/no answer" category includes respondents who refused to answer a particular question.

1. I am going to read you a list of the services that some public libraries provide to people. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you think that all libraries should provide the service, whether it is a useful but not always necessary service, or whether this is a service that libraries should definitely not provide? ....

	General Public (N=1181)	Librarians (N=390)
a. Videotapes of recent motion pictures		
All libraries should provide the service;	25%	12%
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	42%	71%
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	31%	16%
Don't know/no answer	2%	1%
	100%	100%
b. Educational videos	(N=1181)	(N=390)
All libraries should provide the service,	87%	70%
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	11%	30%
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	1%	0%
Don't know/no answer	1%	0%
	100%	100%
c. Programs that help adults learn to read	(N=1181)	(N=390)
All libraries should provide the service,	93%	62%
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	5%	37%
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	1%	1%
Don't know/no answer	1%	0%
	100%	100%
d. A reference desk that answers information requests	(N=1181)	(N=390)
All libraries should provide the service,	89%	95%
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	9%	5%
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	1%	0%
Don't know/no answer	1%	0%
	100%	100%
* e. Provide after-school care for children of working parents	(N=1181)	(N=390)
All libraries should provide the service,	39%	3%
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	29%	35%
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	29%	61%
Don't know/no answer	3%	1%
	100%	100%

2. I would also like to ask you about whether some kinds of library materials should be available to certain people. For each of these I would like you to tell me whether they should be available to anyone who asks for them, available only to adults, available to young people with their parents permission or should these materials not be in the library at all?...

* a. Books and other material that give birth control information

	General Public (N=1181)	Librarians (N=390)
Should they be...		
Available to anyone,	56%	93%
Available only to adults,	8%	1%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	31%	5%
or not be in the library at all?	4%	1%
Don't know/no answer	1%	0%
	100%	100%

b. Books and other material that talk about how to prevent AIDS

	(N=1181)	(N=390)
Should they be...		
Available to anyone,	85%	96%
Available only to adults,	3%	0%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	10%	3%
or not be in the library at all?	1%	1%
Don't know/no answer	1%	0%
	100%	100%

c. Magazines such as Playboy and Penthouse

	(N=1181)	(N=390)
Should they be		
Available to anyone,	3%	30%
Available only to adults,	21%	15%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	5%	14%
or not be in the library at all?	70%	37%
Don't know/no answer	1%	4%
	100%	100%

* d. Records and audiotapes that some people would say have offensive language

	(N=1181)	(N=390)
Should they be		
Available to anyone,	13%	71%
Available only to adults,	18%	6%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	22%	16%
or not be in the library at all?	44%	5%
Don't know/no answer	3%	2%
	100%	100%

* e. Books that describe how to commit suicide

	(N=1181)	(N=390)
Should they be		
Available to anyone,	10%	66%
Available only to adults,	12%	11%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	4%	7%
or not be in the library at all?	71%	15%
Don't know/no answer	3%	1%
	100%	100%

3. Which one of the following three groups do you think should be responsible for libraries? Independent citizen boards, local government or librarians and library staff?.

	General Public (N=1181)	Librarians (N=390)
Independent citizen boards	26%	37%
Local governments	23%	13%
Librarians and library staff	41%	35%
Don't know/no answer	10%	15%
	100%	100%

4. I'm going to read you a list of some groups who might be involved in controversies about the kinds of materials that libraries should have. For each I would like you to tell me how much of a say they should have in controversies about the kinds of materials that should be in libraries..

* a. What about government officials? Should they have...	(N=1181)	(N=390)
No say at all	25%	56%
Some say	65%	39%
or a great deal of say	7%	3%
Don't know/no answer	3%	2%
	100%	100%

b. Ministers and leaders of religious groups	(N=1181)	(N=390)
No say at all	27%	57%
Some say	62%	40%
or a great deal of say	8%	1%
Don't know/no Answer	2%	2%
	100%	100%

c. Parent's groups like the PTA	(N=1181)	(N=390)
No say at all	8%	51%
Some say	59%	44%
or a great deal of say	31%	2%
Don't know/no answer	1%	3%
	100%	100%

d. Other interest groups like civil rights groups, labor unions or political parties

	(N=1181)	(N=390)
No say at all	41%	55%
Some say	52%	41%
or a great deal of say	4%	2%
Don't know/no answer	3%	2%
	100%	100%

* 5. Now lets suppose that your local library needs additional funds to continue operation. Please tell me if you would favor as a possible solution? Would you favor increasing taxes to cover the necessary cost; the library charging the people who use the library or reducing the services that it offers to the public.

	(N=1181)	(N=390)
1. Increase taxes	44%	73%
2. Charge people for use	41%	9%
3. Reduce services	8%	8%
4. Don't know/no answer	7%	10%
	100%	100%

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* 6. Have you used the services of a public library in the past year or not? (N=1181)

1. Have used library services	68%
2. Have not used library services (SKIP TO QUESTION 9)	32%
	100%

7. IF YES: How many times in the past year have you used public library services? (N=803)

Interviewer do not read

1. One to four times	27%
2. Five to eleven times	25%
3. Twelve or more times	48%
	100%

8. Which of the following services did you use? Did you... (N=803)

1. Check out a book

Yes	86%
No	14%
	100%

2. Check out records and audio tapes

Yes	25%
No	75%
	100%

3. Check out videocassette movies

Yes	24%
No	76%
	100%

4. Use a computer terminal

Yes	40%
No	60%
	100%

5. Read newspapers or magazines

Yes	59%
No	41%
	100%

6. Attend a library program like a storyhour, lecture or movie

Yes	21%
No	79%
	100%

9. In general are you comfortable using public libraries? (N=803)

[Interviewer do not read categories. OK to probe on somewhat/sort of by asking: Is that closer to a no or a yes.]

1. Yes	98%
2. Somewhat/sort of	1%
3. No	1%
	100%

10. Overall do you feel that most people who use public libraries have backgrounds and values like yours? (N=1121)

[Interviewer do not read categories. OK to probe on somewhat/sort of by asking: Is that closer to a no or a yes.]

1. Yes	59%
2. Somewhat/sort of	14%
3. No	16%
4. Don't know/no answer	11%
	100%

GO TO QUESTION 12

11. What is the main reason that you have not used a public library in the past year? (N=378)

[Interviewer do no read categories. If "other" please specify.]

1. Too expensive, cost of non-resident card, services	0%
2. No time	34%
3. No interest	7%
4. No need	31%
5. Purchase books and magazines	12%
6. Other specify	13%
Don't know/no answer	3%
	100%

* 12. Is there a personal computer in your home? (N=1181)

Yes	29%
No	71%
	100%

IF YES: Is it used to access an on-line information service? (N=342)

Yes	21%
No	76%
Don't know/no answer	3%
	100%

Now I would just like to ask you a few background questions to help us analyze the results of this study

13. On a scale of one to ten, with one being very conservative and 10 being very liberal, where would you place your political views? (N=1181)

1	5%
2	3%
3	10%
4	9%
5	30%
6	9%
7	11%
8	11%
9	2%
10	6%
Don't know/no answer	4%
	100%

14. What is the approximate size of the community in which you live? (N=1181)

Under 5,000	22%
Under 50,000	35%
Under 100,000	17%
(over 100,000)	22%
Don't know/no answer	4%
	100%

15. Would you consider the area in which you live to be... (N=1181)

Rural	34%
Urban	27%
Suburban	37%
Don't know/no answer	2%
	100%

16. What is the highest grade or year in school you have completed? (N=1181)

Less than high school diploma	8%
High school graduate or GED	30%
Some college or trade school (2 year degree)	30%
College degree	19%
Graduate or professional degree	12%
Don't know/no answer	1%
	100%

17. Are there any children between the ages of 5 and 18 who live in your household? (N=1181)

1. Yes	38%
2. No	62%
	100%

18. In what year were you born? (N = 1181)

Over 40 years of age	55%
Under 40 years of age	45%
	100%

19. Are you .... (N = 1181)

White	84%
Black	8%
Hispanic	3%
Asian, or	1%
Something else	2%
Don't know/no answer	2%
	100%

20a. During 1990, was the total household income, from all members and all sources, before taxes? (N = 1181)

Less than $25,000 (go to Q. 20b)	16%
$25,000 and above (go to Q. 20c)	72%
Don't know/no answer	12%
	100%

21. INTERVIEWER (DO NOT ASK) RECORD SEX (N = 1181)

Male	40%
Female	60%
	100%

APPENDIX A

1. I am going to read you a list of the services that some public libraries provide to people. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you think that all libraries should provide the service, whether it is a useful but not always necessary service, or whether this is a service that libraries should definitely not provide? ....

1e. Provide after-school care for children of working parents

if respondent's income is...	under $25,000 (N=302)	$25,000+ (N=734)
Should all libraries should provide the service,	47%	36%
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	25%	30%
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	24%	31%
Don't know/no answer	4%	3%
	100%	100%

if respondent's age is...	under 40 (N=438)	40 & over (N=365)
Should all libraries should provide the service,	40%	37%
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	33%	24%
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	23%	36%
Don't know/no answer	3%	3%
	100%	100%

2. I would also like to ask you about whether some kinds of library materials should be available to certain people. For each of these I would like you to tell me whether they should be available to anyone who asks for them, available only to adults, available to young people with their parents permission or should these materials not be in the library at all?...

2a. Books and other material that give birth control information

if respondent's income is...	under $25,000 (N=302)	$25,000+ (N=734)
Should they be...		
Available to anyone,	48%	61%
Available only to adults,	9%	7%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	35%	29%
or not be in the library at all?	7%	3%
Don't know/no answer	1%	--
	100%	100%

if respondent's age is...	under 40 (N=438)	40 & over (N=365)
Should they be...		
Available to anyone,	62%	49%
Available only to adults,	6%	10%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	29%	33%
or not be in the library at all?	3%	7%
Don't know/no answer	--	1%
	100%	100%

2d. Records and audiotapes that some people would say have offensive language

if respondent's age is...	under 40 (N=438)	40 & over (N=365)
Should they be		
Available to anyone,	16%	9%
Available only to adults,	19%	16%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	27%	17%
or not be in the library at all?	34%	54%
Don't know/no answer	3%	4%
	100%	100%

if respondent has...	children 5-18 years of age (N=345)	no children (N=457)
Should they be		
Available to anyone,	13%	13%
Available only to adults,	20%	16%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	28%	19%
or not be in the library at all?	37%	48%
Don't know/no answer	2%	4%
	100%	100%

2e. Books that describe how to commit suicide

if respondent's income is...	under $25,000 (N=302)	$25,000+ (N=734)
Should they be		
Available to anyone,	6%	12%
Available only to adults,	8%	15%
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	2%	4%
or not be in the library at all?	81%	66%
Don't know/no answer	2%	3%
	100%	100%

4. I'm going to read you a list of some groups who might be involved in controversies about the kinds of materials that libraries should have. For each I would like you to tell me how much of a say they should have in controversies about the kinds of materials that should be in libraries..

4a. What about government officials? Should they have...

if respondent's age is...	under 40 (N=438)	40 & over (N=365)
No say at all	21%	31%
Some say	68%	61%
or a great deal of say	9%	5%
Don't know/no answer	2%	3%
	100%	100%

4d. Other interest groups like civil rights groups, labor unions or political parties

if respondent's age is...	under 40 (438)	40 & over (365)
No say at all	36%	46%
Some say	57%	46%
or a great deal of say	5%	3%
Don't know/no answer	2%	5%
	100%	100%

5. Now lets suppose that your local library needs additional funds to continue operation. Please tell me if you would favor as a possible solution? Would you favor increasing taxes to cover the necessary cost; the library charging the people who use the library or reducing the services that it offers to the public.

if respondent's income is...	under $25,000 (N = 302)	$25,000 + (N = 734)
1. Increase taxes	36%	49%
2. Charge people for use	42%	40%
3. Reduce services	12%	6%
4. Don't Know/no Answer	10%	5%
	100%	100%

6. Have you used the services of a public library in the past year or not?

if respondent has...	children 5-18 years of age (N = 345)	no children (N = 457)
1. Have used library services	77%	63%
2. Have not used library services (SKIP TO QUESTION 9)	23%	37%
	100%	100%

if respondent's income is...	under $25,000 (N = 302)	$25,000 + (N = 734)
1. Have used library services	56%	74%
2. Have not used library services (SKIP TO QUESTION 9)	44%	26%
	100%	100%

12. Is there a personal computer in your home?

if respondent has...	children 5-18 years of age (N = 345)	no children (N = 457)
Yes	40%	23%
No	60%	77%
	100%	100%

if respondent's income is...	under $25,000 (N = 302)	$25,000+ (N = 734)
Yes	12%	37%
No	88%	63%
	100%	100%

Library Research Center
National Opinion Poll on Library Issues
Fall 1991

1. I am going to read you a list of the services that some public libraries provide to people. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether you think that *all libraries **should provide the service***, whether it is a ***useful but not always necessary service***, or whether this is ***a service that libraries should definitely not provide***? ....

a. Videotapes of recent motion pictures

Should all libraries should provide the service,	1
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	2
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	3
Don't know/no answer	4
Refused	

b. Educational videos

Should all libraries should provide the service,	1
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	2
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	3
Don't know/no answer	4
Refused	

c. Programs that help adults learn to read.

Should all libraries should provide the service,	1
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	2
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	3
Don't know/no answer	4
Refused	

d. A reference desk that answers information requests

Should all libraries should provide the service,	1
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	2
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	3
Don't know/no answer	4
Refused	5

e. Provide after-school care for children of working parents

Should all libraries should provide the service,	1
is it a useful but not always necessary service, or	2
is it a service that libraries should definitely not provide?	3
Don't know/no answer	4
Refused	

2. I would also like to ask you about whether some kinds of library materials should be available to certain people. For each of these I would like you to tell me whether they ***should be available to anyone who asks for them***, available ***only to adults***, available to ***young people with their parents permission*** or should these materials ***not be in the library at all***?...

a. Books and other material that give birth control information

Should they be...

Available to anyone,	1
Available only to adults,	2
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	3
or not be in the library at all?	4
DK/NA	5
Refused	6

b. Books and other material that talk about how to prevent AIDS.

Should they be...

Available to anyone,	1
Available only to adults,	2
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	3
or not be in the library at all?	4
DK/NA	5
Refused	6

c. Magazines such as Playboy and Penthouse

Should they be

Available to anyone,	1
Available only to adults,	2
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	3
or not be in the library at all?	4
DK/NA	5
Refused	6

d. Records and audiotapes that some people would say have offensive language

Should they be

Available to anyone,	1
Available only to adults,	2
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	3
or not be in the library at all?	4
DK/NA	5
Refused	6

e. Books that describe how to commit suicide

Should they be

Available to anyone,	1
Available only to adults,	2
Available to young people with their parent's permission,	3
or not be in the library at all?	4
DK/NA	5
Refused	6

3. Which one of the following three groups do you think should be responsible for libraries? Independent citizen boards, local government or librarians and library staff?.

Independent citizen boards	1
Local governments	2
Librarians and library staff	3
Don't know/no answer	4
Refused	5

4. I'm going to read you a list of some groups who might be involved in controversies about the kinds of materials that libraries should have. For each I would like you to tell me how much of a say they should have in controversies about the kinds of materials that should be in libraries..

a. What about government officials? Should they have...

No say at all	1
Some say	2
or **a great deal** of say	3
DK/NA	4
Refused	5

b. Ministers and leaders of religious groups

No say at all	1
Some say	2
or **a great deal** of say	3
DK/NA	4
Refused	5

c. Parent's groups like the PTA

No say at all	1
Some say	2
or **a great deal** of say	3
DK/NA	4
Refused	5

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d. Other interest groups like civil rights groups, labor unions or political parties

No say at all	1
Some say	2
or **a great deal** of say	3
DK/NA	4
Refused	5

5. Now lets suppose that your local library needs additional funds to continue operation. Please tell me if you would favor as a possible solution? Would you favor *increasing taxes to cover the necessary cost*; the library *charging the people who use the library* or *reducing the services* that it offers to the public.

1. Increase taxes
2. Charge people for use
3. Reduce services
4. Don't Know/No Answer
5. Refused

6. Have you used the services of a public library in the past year or not?

1. Have used library services
2. Have not used library services (SKIP TO QUESTION 9)
3. Don't know/No answer
4. Refused

7. IF YES: How many times in the past year have you used public library services?

Interviewer do not read

1. One to four times
2. Five to eleven times
3. Twelve or more times
4. Don't know (Not Sure)/ No Answer
5. Refused

8. Which of the following services did you use? Did you...

	Yes	No	DK/NA	REF
1. Check out a book	1	2	3	4
2. Check out records and audio tapes	1	2	3	4
3. Check out videocassette movies	1	2	3	4
4. Use a computer terminal	1	2	3	4
5. Read newspapers or magazines	1	2	3	4
6. Attend a library program like a storyhour, lecture or movie	1	2	3	4

9. In general are you comfortable using public libraries?

Interviewer do not read categories. OK to probe on somewhat/sort of by asking: Is that closer to a no or a yes.

1. Yes
2. Somewhat/sort of
3. No
4. Don't Know/ No answer
5. Refused

10. Overall do you feel that most people who use public libraries have backgrounds and values like yours?

Interviewer do not read categories. OK to probe on somewhat/sort of by asking: Is that closer to a no or a yes.

1. Yes
2. Somewhat/sort of
3. No
4. Don't Know/ No answer
5. Refused

GO TO QUESTION 12

11. What is the main reason that you have not used a public library in the past year?

Interviewer do no read categories. If "other" please specify.

1. Too expensive, cost of non-resident card, services
2. No time
3. No interest
4. No need
5. Purchase books and magazines
6. Other specify

12. Is there a personal computer in your home?

Yes	1
No	2

IF YES Is it used to access an on-line information service?

Yes	1
No	2

Now I would just like to ask you a few background questions to help us analyze the results of this study

13. On a scale of one to ten, with one being very conservative and 10 being very liberal, where would you place your political views?

*Interviewer record number*_____
Don't Know/No Answer
Refused

14. What is the approximate size of the community in which you live?

Under 5,000	1
Under 50,000	2
Under 100,000	3
Don't know	4
Refused	5

15. Would you consider the area in which you live to be...

Urban	1
Rural	2
Suburban	3
Don't know	4
Refused	5

16. What is the highest grade or year in school you have completed?

Less than high school diploma	1
High school graduate or GED	2
Some college or trade school (2 year degrees)	3
College degree	4
Graduate or professional degree	5
Don't know	6
Refused	7

17. Are there any children between the ages of 5 and 18 who live in your household?

1. Yes
2. No
3. Don't know/No Answer
4. Refused

18. In what year were you born?

Interviewer: Record year_____

19. Are you ....

White	1	
Black	2	
Hispanic	3	
Asian, or	4	
Something else	5	(SPECIFY ON NEXT QUESTION)

18a. What is your ethnic origin? (Open-ended)

20a. During 1990, was the total household income, from all members and all sources, before taxes?

Less than $25,000	or	(go to Q. 20b)
$25,000 and above		(go to Q. 20c)
Don't know		
Refused		

20b. Was it less than $15,000?

Yes
No
Don't know
Refused

(go to Question 21)

20c. Was it $40,000 or more?

Yes (go to Q. 20d)
No
Don't know
Refused

(go to Question 21)

20d. Was it $60,000 or more?

Yes
No
Don't know
Refused

READ: That's all the questions I have. Thank you very much for your help. Goodbye.

21. INTERVIEWER (DO NOT ASK) RECORD SEX

Male	1
Female	2